

## Incognito Is My Modus Operandi

John Hanks, DC

Several years ago, I was sitting in the middle seat of a Boeing 737, traveling home from Florida, when the lady sitting on the aisle seat asked me what I did for a living. I turned my head toward her and smiled. "I'm a clam farmer." Actually, that was not a lie. But I didn't tell her the whole truth, since I left out some information. What I could have told her is, "I'm a chiropractor who invested in a clam farm, because I was going through a midlife slump, and I was just out in the inland waterway up to my chest in water, putting down nets over clam beds so the crabs wouldn't eat them, simultaneously being careful not to step on stingrays." That's what I should have said. But at that moment, and for a few minutes, I just wanted to be someone else besides a chiropractor.

It was fun. The woman and I talked about aquaculture for about an hour, and I surprised myself with the new knowledge I had acquired during the previous months. I was enjoying myself immensely when the young guy in the window seat asked, "What's a clam farmer doing reading about chiropractic stuff?" Indeed, he noticed I was reading a copy of *Dynamic Chiropractic*. The jig was up.

I'm content being a chiropractor. It fits well with who I am. Almost by definition, being a chiropractor seems to mean someone who has an independent streak. In fact, most DCs I have known are interesting people, with interesting hobbies and avocations. We are not one-dimensional people. Maybe that's why, in my opinion, DCs need to take on different identities sometimes.

One DC I know from the Deep South loves to take part in Civil War re-enactments. "John," he said to me once, "when I'm a sergeant in the Georgia brigade, I feel like I'm truly alive!" Unfortunately, he couldn't "feel alive" very long, because that year his assigned lot was shot and killed by a Yankee sharpshooter, before the first charge even began. No matter he was in his glory. "The problem is," he admitted, "as soon as the guys find out I'm a chiropractor, I end up having to adjust dang near the whole company, including the general."

I don't feel "truly alive," but I do feel quite full, when I'm a judge at barbeque cook-off contests. That's right I'm certified by the Kansas City Barbeque Society, #12560. All it took was \$60, four hours of eating "Q," and holding up my hand and pledging to "promote excellence in barbeque and strengthen the American way of life." So, I feel I'm doing something important. When the question of occupation comes up, I tell folks that I'm a retired hog farmer. This identity gives me more respect when they bring in the barbequed ribs for judging. And, it is also not a lie. I live on a small ranch, and sure enough, my son and I once raised a few pigs. That novelty wore off very quickly, so I retired. But I can still "talk pork" with the best of 'em.

Many DCs don't want to quit practice, but they would like to make some money doing something else; perhaps a side business in which they don't have to physically work so hard. I have heard of a chiropractor in a small Midwestern town who bought a Dairy Queen franchise. His wife and kids worked the ice cream store, but in the summer evenings, when things got busy, "Doc" would help. He loved the change of pace, but soon his identity caught up with him. He could not be incognito when he was right there at the service window. Patients who couldn't get into the office during

regular hours started coaxing him to treat them on a picnic table next to the store. It just took a few nights of people seeing him adjust others on that table, before he was obliged to set up a portable adjusting table and start "evening hours" at the Dairy Queen.

It is understandable that many of us get tired of people's problems, insurance problems, staff problems, and problems on top of problems. Changing jobs so we can encounter different problems is seductive. I know of one DC who quit practice so he could sell pre-paid legal plans. But there are some individuals who shouldn't have become chiropractors in the first place. I attended homecoming at my alma mater one year, and was across the street from the campus at a drug store, standing in line, waiting to pay for my purchase. The checkout person was in a conversation with the man in front of me, talking about the traffic and how hard it was to cross the street, unless one walked to the corner traffic light. The checkout kid commented, "Yeah, I'm a student at the medical school across the street, and I gave up trying to jaywalk."

The "medical school" across the street was where I graduated as a doctor of chiropractic. I wanted to slap this kid and tell him to go to podiatry school or become a drug salesman. His identity was in trouble. To this day, I wonder if he ever survived in practice.

When I was fresh out of chiropractic school, I also felt a little insecure. I tried different ways of introducing myself, using "chiropractic physician" or "doctor of chiropractic." But that ended when I finally had enough patients to make me feel needed, and when I was finally making a living. As funny as that sounds, that is what cemented my identity. So, when I'm not a BBQ judge, just call me "chiropractor."

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